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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 002894

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PK](#) [PREF](#)
SUBJECT: "SUSPENSION" NOT CEASE-FIRE

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. During a September 2 meeting with Ambassador, Interior Minister Malik insisted that there was no "cease-fire" in the tribal areas but only a one-month suspension of air operations during Ramadan. This was in response to parliamentarians' complaints about collateral damage and concern that conditions in the camps for internally displaced persons (IDPs) was deplorable. Malik said the suspension would be called off if the militants resumed training, regrouped or launched cross-border attacks.

He reported that the Army was moving a brigade into Bajaur to reinforce the Frontier Corps. He noted that fighting has not stopped in Swat. Despite denying that there was any connection between the suspension and politics, Malik predicted that fighting would resume "after September 6," the date of the presidential election. Post reporting corroborates the fact that the GOP is continuing operations in both Bajaur and Swat and that IDPs are now leaving unhealthy camp conditions to return to Bajaur. On political maneuvering, Malik said the GOP would restore some Supreme Court justices in the coming days and predicted that Musharraf's party would vote for Zardari. He asked for help in countering increasingly negative western press about Zardari. End Summary.

¶2. (C) Ambassador and Polcouns met September 2 with Interior Minister Rehman Malik at his request. Malik wanted to explain that, despite press reporting, there was no cease-fire in Bajaur and Swat. He explained that he had visited the Northwest Frontier Province (NWFP) over the weekend and had met with parliamentarians from the Federally Administered Tribal Areas who were concerned about collateral damage from GOP shelling of militant positions. Malik also visited "incognito" several of the camps that the GOP has set up for the internally displaced persons (IDPs) fleeing the fighting in Bajaur and the NWFP flooding. According to Malik, the conditions in the camps was deplorable, with no sanitation, fouled drinking water, mosquitoes and bad food. Then he met with Army and Frontier Corps commanders to assess the situation.

¶3. (C) Based on the combination of political pressure and humanitarian concerns over Ramadan, Malik decided to declare a "suspension" of aerial bombing during the month of Ramadan. Already as many as 27,000 IDPs were returning home for Ramadan. However, Malik insisted that Army and Frontier Corps forces would remain in place. In fact, he said the Army was sending in a brigade to reinforce the Frontier Corps in Bajaur. If there is any sign that the militants are regrouping, launching cross-border attacks into Afghanistan,

or resuming training, then the suspension would be canceled. Malik noted that militants in Swat had rejected any suspension of hostilities and the GOP already has resumed attacks there. Maulana Fazlullah, claimed Malik, was on the run. He also claimed that the GOP was preparing to launch attacks in Parachinar, which has been the scene of continued sectarian clashes that have left several hundred dead in the past few weeks.

¶4. (C) Malik said the GOP was heartened by news that in some places the local people were themselves fighting back. There are media reports that locals formed a lashkar (posse) in Bajaur to fight militants. Malik said the Salarzai tribe was fighting Faqir Mohammad's militants as well. Confirming his belief in rumors that are circulating, Malik said that Zawahari's wife had been seen in Mohmand Agency en route either to or from Afghanistan. Malik asked Ambassador to facilitate contacts with the GOA's Interior Ministry to help work jointly to go after Zawahari. He noted that the GOP has provided documents regarding the identity of two Afghan militiamen picked up (nfi) in the last few days; the GOP was waiting for confirmation before deciding next steps.

¶5. (C) Without prompting, Malik insisted that Pakistan People's Party (PPP) leader Asif Zardari had not made any special deal with Jamial Ulema-e-Islam leader Fazlur Rehman to ensure his vote in the upcoming presidential elections. The GOP would not allow the radical Jamia Hafsa madrassah in Islamabad to reopen, despite Fazlur's comments to the media. "If necessary, I will flood the place and cut off the electricity." The GOP, he said, would allow the Lal Masjid

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mosque to reopen, under government control, and would allow some female students to return to another of the mosque's madrassahs, but only a limited number under strict government monitoring.

Political Maneuvering

¶6. (C) Rehman also reported that he had been meeting with various political parties, including Jamaat-e-Islam (JI) leader Qazi Hussain, Pakistan Muslim League's (PML) Chaudhry Shujaat, and Pakistan Muslim League-N's (PML-N) Chaudhry Nisar. He claimed to be working to convince Qazi to stop issuing statements saying that the PPP was doing American bidding in the FATA. He pointed out to Qazi that the suicide bombers were not American, they were locals.

¶7. (C) Rehman said he had met secretly in Lahore with Chaudhry Shujaat of the PML. He predicted that the PML would support Zardari in the presidential election and at least tacitly support the PPP government in Islamabad. Pervaiz Elahi would remain as Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly because the Speaker (a member of the PPP) controlled this determination. The PPP would block PML-N's Chaudhry Nisar from becoming Opposition Leader.

¶8. (C) According to Malik, PML-N, like JI, is increasingly critical of GOP policy in Bajaur and is using anti-American rhetoric against the military campaign. Malik believed that Nisar wants to be Prime Minister and increasingly is pursuing his own agenda apart from that of the Sharif brothers. Malik claimed that Nisar was going out of his way to create rifts between Nawaz Sharif and Asif Zardari. He claimed that he recommended to Zardari that the PPP not try to oust Shahbaz Sharif from his post as Chief Minister of Punjab as it would create more bad blood. (Note: Due to a technicality, there is a court challenge pending that would declare Shahbaz ineligible to be Chief Minister and, under a two-term limit, prevent him from resuming the position.) Malik said that that Zardari had restored Sindh and Lahore High Court judges and would also restore some of the Supreme Court judges in the near future.

Help Us Fight Negative Press

¶9. (C) Finally, Malik noted the increasingly negative press that Zardari is receiving in the western media and asked if the USG could help fight it. Ambassador noted that the source of the negative press has been Pakistan's own media. She said, however, that she would ask the Department to consider issuing a statement saying that the USG would respect the choice of the Pakistani people's vote in the September 6 presidential election.

¶10. (C) Comment: Malik's comments track with reporting we are receiving from the Army and the Frontier Corps. According to ODRP in Peshawar, the 11th Corps confirmed that there are no plans for a cease-fire in Bajaur. They will continue bombing missions and helicopter patrols while conducting the buildup of forces in preparation of ground operations. Military aircraft bombed Taliban positions in Swat on September 1 and 2, and forces used both artillery and attack helicopters in attacks on militant positions there. In the past two weeks, separate tribal leaders near Peshawar, Bajaur, Swat and Dir have raised local tribal lashkar forces to expel militants from their areas. Tribesmen in Salarzai formed a lashkar on August 31 against local Taliban and torched 14 houses, including that of a local Taliban leader. The decision to send another brigade to Bajaur was already in train. The fact that the military is continuing operations despite Malik's announced "suspension" is another sign of the GOP's inability to effectively coordinate strategy and operations.

PATTERSON